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John E. Joseph

Identity work and face work across linguistic and cultural boundaries

Abstract:¹ Identity and face are each an imagining of the self, or of another, within a public sphere involving multiple actors. Because they have come into language and discourse research from different directions, researchers frame them in such a way that they can seem only tangentially related. This article examines what binds and distinguishes them, by approaching a set of conversational data – all from Scotland, yet crossing perceived cultural and linguistic boundaries – from the point of view of both the face work and the identity work undertaken by the participants. Identity and face are often taken as representing durative and punctual ways of looking at the same phenomena. Yet explanations of punctual actions and events always have recourse to durative characteristics of those who perform them; and evidence for those durative characteristics is drawn from the punctual actions and events interpreted as embodying and indexing them. This complexity is multiplied by that of the different scales on which face and identity are observed and indexed.

Keywords: Face, identity, stance, indexicality, Scotland, Scottish dialects, sociolinguistics

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1 Definitions and distinctions

Identity and face have much in common. Each is an imagining of the self, or of another, within a public sphere involving multiple actors. Yet they have come into language and discourse research from different directions, and this difference in their origins has led researchers to frame them in such a way that they

¹ I am grateful to those behind the SCOTS Corpus project (<http://www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk/>) for their careful work with this rich data source which is freely available for educational purposes. The website includes the tapes of the conversations.

seem no more than tangentially related to one another. This article examines what binds them and distinguishes them, by approaching a set of conversational data – all from Scotland, yet crossing perceived cultural and linguistic boundaries – from the point of view of both the “face work” and the “identity work” undertaken by the participants.

Identity relates classically to who individuals are, understood in terms of the groups to which they belong, including nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, generation, sexual orientation, social class and an unlimited number of other possibilities. Face, on the other hand, relates classically to exchanges between or amongst individuals; more specifically, in the view of Goffman (1967: 5) “during a particular contact” (see below). There has been, in other words, a fundamental distinction drawn between how the two concepts relate to time, with face as a punctual phenomenon, identity as a durative one. This is not to say that an individual’s behaviour in terms of face is devoid of consistency, or that face work does not have enduring consequences, but simply that we tend to think of face as something that becomes relevant in interactions. By the same token, a person’s awareness of his or her identity may lie below the surface until a particular contact creates a tension that brings it to the fore; yet it has classically been conceived of as a property of the person. The definitions of both face and identity have however been problematized in work of the last decade (for face, see Haugh and Bargiela-Chiappini 2010; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich this volume; for identity, see Joseph 2004: 3–11).

To quote Goffman’s definition of *face* in full, it is “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact”. This was famously altered by Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) to “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”. What the two have in common is that they envisage face as a value/image with a social/public element and having the status of a claim, of which a person/member is both the implicit subject and object (for some more recent conceptualizations of face see Arundale 2006, 2009, 2010, and the various contributions to Bargiela-Chiappini and Haugh 2009; Haugh and Bargiela-Chiappini 2010).

Henri Tajfel, who led the development of Social Identity Theory starting in the early 1970s defined social identity as “that *part* of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1978: 63 *italics in original*). Within this simple definition are embedded at least five positions which in their time were quite revolutionary: that social identity pertains to an individual rather than to a social group; that it is a matter of *self-concept*, rather than of social categories into which

one simply falls; that the fact of *membership* is the essential thing, rather than anything having to do with the nature of the group itself; that an individual's own knowledge of the membership, and the particular value they attach to it – completely “subjective” factors – are what count; that emotional significance is not some trivial side effect of the identity belonging but an integral part of it.

Identity is less of a “term of art” than face, being used by sociologists, sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists in a way not quite so distant from its meaning in non-specialist discourse. The relevant definition of *identity* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is “Who or what a person or thing is; a distinct impression of a single person or thing presented to or perceived by others; a set of characteristics or a description that distinguishes a person or thing from others”. Here we find nothing so abstract as a value or image, nor any sense of it being a claim made by subjects about themselves. It can be either what a thing actually is, in some implicitly absolutist perspective (with all the epistemological issues this raises), or what it is perceived to be by others.

It is important not to lose sight of this dual sense of identity as something we take to have an essential (but ungraspable) reality, yet recognize as being constructed based on perceptions that are only partial. The temptation to assume that all identity is always freely constructed is strong, but deceptive. Blommaert, taking inspiration from Wallerstein's (1998) world-systems approach, has argued for applying the metaphor of “scales” in relation to sociolinguistic agency, where the metaphor refers to maps drawn at different scales (see Blommaert 2007a and b, 2010; Dong and Blommaert 2010). An act of identity that may feel like wholly a matter of free choice on the individual scale can appear quite different when viewed on the broader institutional or cultural scale, where the social structures that may have guided the choice are rendered more visible than on the scale of the individual act.

The term *stance* has come into prominence in recent sociolinguistic work (see Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 2008 and the studies in Jaffe 2009), to designate individual linguistic identity as performed in discourse, sometimes modelled on particular figures, notably media figures, who have come to embody certain social categories. By putting the spotlight on how identities are emergent in interaction, and on the constructedness of individual identity on models rooted in social categorization, it is bringing the study of identity in language closer than ever to studies of politeness and face, whilst helping us to deal with an important aspect of the individual-group and structured-agentive paradoxes. Stance is implicitly aligned with the idea of the person wilfully choosing the image(ing), even when modelling it after some already established model, often a type that has acquired positive value via the media. The type in question can even be a stereotype, and is sometimes embodied in a particular star. It is

like dressing “creatively”, which nowadays is infinitely more likely to mean choosing one’s fashion style from what is on the racks at a popular chain shop than actually designing and making one’s own clothes. Stance gives analysts a vocabulary for describing how even clearly agentive linguistic acts can involve a complex relationship between individual and group identities.

A core problem with all these terms is that they are grammatically nouns, but semantically verbal, in the sense that they designate a process, a doing something, which is the prototypical work of a verb. The same is true of *language*: in Joseph (2002) I have argued that language, the mass noun, is semantically verbal, while language(s), the count noun, is more like adverbial, being a particular way of doing the action of language. Their nominalization is bound up with the fact that we conceive of them as things, with all the fallacious reification which that entails. Many scholars have made this point with regard to identity (for a survey see Joseph 2004: 9–11). As for face, it often tends, like other aspects of politeness, to be treated as an essentially universal phenomenon (see for example the subtitle of Brown and Levinson 1987), which may vary from culture to culture but still exhibits the sort of essential unity which the Gricean maxims attempt to capture. Even when a differentiation is made between “positive-face” and “negative-face cultures”, it is likely to be about how an idealized, abstract concept of face is differently distributed, rather than involving a substantially different form of human interaction.

A second problem with the terms has to do with how they are deployed by analysts. The perspective on linguistic identity taken in Joseph (2004, 2010) expressly distances itself from the desire to uncover what identity a speaker is attempting to project, and then to use that as an explanation of why the speaker uses certain linguistic forms and not others. Whether or not a speaker is trying to project an identity is a relatively minor issue, compared to the much more important one of how that speaker’s identity is perceived by other people – if only because everyone we encounter constructs an identity for us, based on whatever indices they interpret us as projecting, whether or not we are aware of projecting them, let alone intending it. There are countless versions of you out there in the minds of others, each different from the persona you imagine for yourself, because everyone brings their own experience of life and of reading other people to bear in this work of interpreting the identity of those we meet. This is not to deny that your version of you is a privileged version; but it is unknowable to anyone *but* you, and that is what limits its significance when it comes to the analysis of identity and language.

If identity, face, stance or politeness are to be investigated empirically, it must be in terms not of the speaker’s intentions, which are impervious to observation, but of hearers’ interpretations, which are open to observation, question-

ing, cross-checking and other methodological reassurances. It is true that, when hearers interpret a speaker's identity, they often do so on the assumption that they are simply receiving what the speaker is wilfully projecting; just as, when reading a text, it is usually the author's intended meaning that we assume we are trying to recover, when, strictly speaking, such intention is irrecoverable. It is also true that a speaker's own reflections on his or her utterances and what was behind them can give significant insight, but it is essential to bear in mind that they are not definitive. We are often blind to the motives behind our actions, and even when we are not, we are not always prepared to reveal them to others, if only as a matter of saving face.

2 Shifting the scale: Culture and indexicality

Sections 3 and 4 of this article will examine the interrelation of these concepts in the analysis of two spoken texts from the SCOTS Corpus, a publicly-funded open corpus of oral and written texts located at the University of Glasgow. They illustrate the similarities and differences between face and identity, as well as some of the intricate ways in which they interact with each other and with politeness and stance. Following the analysis, I shall consider what light the data throw back onto the concepts, their definitions and the uses we make of them. First, however, it is necessary to consider the question of *scale*: the reason being that identity, for example, does not refer to exactly the same thing on the scale of the individual and the scale of the social group, and it shifts again when the scale changes from that of intimate social groups to broader communities, including those identities – as powerful as they are nebulous – which get labelled as “cultural”.

Actions and beliefs which appear to be attributable to the inclinations or choices of an individual on the scale of personal identity and face can look significantly different when the focus is pulled back to the scale of a community or nation. When, on this scale, individual choices are perceived as following predictable patterns – especially when these patterns differ from those of other communities or nations – they are instead attributed to *culture*. I say “perceived as following predictable patterns” because part of the power of culture is that, while it is meant to explain how people's actions are performed, it affects how their actions are perceived. An outsider who believes certain stereotypes may perceive only those actions which confirm the stereotypes and ignore those that contradict them.

Identities are manifested in language as, first, the categories and labels that people attach to themselves and others to signal their belonging; secondly, as

the indexed ways of speaking and behaving through which they perform their belonging; and thirdly, as the interpretations that others make of those indices. The ability to perceive and interpret the indices is itself part of shared culture. Every individual has a repertoire of identities of various kinds – some combination of national, ethnic, religious, generational and gender identities, together with those relating to social class, sexual orientation, profession, and various levels of sub- and supra-national belonging.

The term “cultural identity” is sometimes applied to some or all of those just named above, while at other times it is reckoned to be a distinct category. On the one hand, culture and identity are never entirely separable: it is a defining trait of the concept of a culture that whatever beliefs, values, inclinations, tastes, practices and texts constitute it must also serve an identity function for those who participate in the culture. On the other hand, no group can be expected to be culturally homogeneous; the urge to tribalize is too deeply rooted in human nature, indeed its ubiquity in animal behaviour testifies to how deep it runs in our evolutionary heritage. So, for instance, within Islamic religious identity there are different ways of being Muslim – in other words a variety of Islamic cultural identities, subsumed under the umbrella of a religious identity that itself admits of variants, Sunni and Shia, and within the latter, Sufis, each with their distinctive practices and texts, even if most of their central beliefs are the same.

Cultural identities rarely carry great imaginative power unless they are textualized as national or racial/ethnic identities. People do not go to war for their culture the way they willingly die for their fatherland or their people, or other “imagined communities” which they perceive as being *naturally* constituted, rather than just arbitrary, contingent cultural constructs (Anderson 1991). And yet, it is not provable that any race or nation is a “natural” entity; all are at least partly constructed, and at the same time, as Mary Catherine Bateson has pointed out, “Everything is natural” (Bateson 1995). Gender identities might seem to be directly linked to the physical configuration of a reproductive organs; and yet, people are readier to accept that an individual is a “woman trapped in a man’s body”, or vice-versa, than they are that someone is a Japanese trapped in an Ethiopian’s body.

Among the constituent elements of cultural identity, shared tastes and inclinations are more bodily and emotional in orientation, while shared beliefs and values are mental and rational. But none of these tastes, inclinations, beliefs or values is directly observable, apart from in oneself through introspection. All that we can observe in others are *practices* and *texts*, from which we infer the other elements. Ethnographic analysis proceeds therefore as though cultures are made up of practices and texts. The practices include how food is obtained

and prepared, how clothing is made and decorated, patterns of marriage and family arrangements, how trade is carried out and how worship is conducted. Often these practices are encoded in or bound up with texts, either in the narrow sense of written texts or oral tradition, or the broader one of visual texts, including paintings, statues and other totemic figures, tattoos, jewellery, songs and chants, dances and the like.

Identities, whether of an individual or of a community, are not a given. They have to be forged – created, transmitted, reproduced, performed – textually and semiotically, that is, through signs. Language being the ultimate semiotic system, every identity ideally wants a language of its own. Not a wholly new language, but at least some segment of the vocabulary that insiders can use to distinguish themselves from outsiders. In Joseph (2006) I argue that this is a much more significant factor in language change than historical linguists have been prepared to admit. For every identity a time comes when a new generation wants it updated. New words, signs and texts are admitted, often by hybridization with some more recent and vibrant identity.

Silverstein (2003) has developed an approach to the analysis of the *indexicality* of language that attempts to capture how cultural meanings – whether on the level of ethnicity, class, gender or any number of other factors – are encoded in and interpreted from utterances. He regards linguistic communication as containing a vast complex of indices, operating on various levels, from those of word meaning, to pragmatics, to the various forms of micro- and macro-social indexing that constitute linguistic identity. His contention is that these levels are not positioned either haphazardly or even on a par with one another, but are ordered hierarchically. Whatever level of indices one may be analyzing (which Silverstein calls n), there is always a next higher level ($n+1$) that will emerge from how n is used in communication. So, for example, my choosing to address someone with informal *tu* or formal *vous* in French indexes my perceived relationship to him or her (level n), but also has immanent within it the potential for me to be indexed by others for what my pronoun choice says about me (level $n+1$). This structured indexicality produces registers, “alternate ways of ‘saying “the same” thing’ considered ‘appropriate to’ particular contexts of usage” (Silverstein 2003: 212), and within which culturally specific meanings are “enregistered” (for a particular application, see Agha 2003).

Blommaert (2007a) has contested Silverstein’s approach on the grounds that it focuses too much on the linguistic sign, rather than on the social institutions that transmit and reproduce orders of indexicality which change according to the scale on which the observation is being made. Indexical order cannot explain why an individual’s linguistic behaviour is regular enough to be identifiable as his or her own. For Blommaert (2007a: 117), “register” can be charac-

terized as follows: “clustered and patterned language forms that index specific social personae and roles, can be invoked to organize interactional practices used for typifying or stereotyping. Speaking or writing through such registers involves insertion in recognizable (normative) repertoires of ‘voices’”. A current debate among linguistic anthropologists is to what extent these indices are precise and fixed or “constitute a field of potential meanings – an indexical field, or constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable” (Eckert 2008: 453).

The analyses of the conversations which follow are more in the spirit of Blommaert and Eckert than of Silverstein, yet they accord with his basic precept that all levels of language analysis, including pragmatics, need to be brought to bear if light is to be shed on phenomena of such complexity, involving fine-grained social interactions, positioning and stance taking place simultaneously on multiple scales.

3 Face and identity: Shetland Scots

The first extracts are from an interview conducted by a German linguist with a woman from Shetland (SCOTS Corpus Interview 12) concerning her views about Scots, the Germanic sister language of English which has long vied with Gaelic – a Celtic language which originated in Ireland – for the status of national language of Scotland. The interviewer has approached his subjects saying that he is conducting research on the language. He raises the difficult issue of establishing a dividing line between Scots and Scottish English – if indeed there is a division in contemporary usage. But his interviewee quickly shifts the focus to her own Shetland perspective, in which Scots is an alien language which poses a potential threat to the local dialect. There are at least three tensions in play here: a linguistic one, having to do with the difficulty of saying what exactly Scots is in relation to the language in which it is in the most direct opposition, namely English; an identity-based one, in which, for reasons that will become clear, the woman is resisting having a Scots identity imposed on her by the “expert” researcher; and a face-based one, which has partly to do with the difficult question of who is the “expert” in a case such as this: the foreign-born linguist (M865 in the transcript), who knows the literature on the subject but is an outsider to the culture, or the native-speaking informant (F951), the insider, whose implicit and explicit knowledge he is trying to glean. I shall term the insider an “expert₁” and the outside observer an “expert₂”.

The tensions begin to emerge when the expert₂ interviewer asks the expert₁ subject a question on an intermediate scale, not the local one of Shetland about

which they have been conversing up to this point, nor the broader one of Scotland versus England, but specifically about what is “typical” Scots.

- M865 Do you think there's any speech variety of whatever sort eh in Scotland that represents Scotland best, where you'd say, “Okay, somehow this is typical Scotland, that represents Sto- Scotland”?
- F951 Mm gosh! Well I don't think that Shetland really does represent Scotland, I mean. Is, I don't know. //I don't know what the true Scottish accent is, //
- M865 //Mm ah yeah, // I mean that's a //a difficult one because, yeah, mm. //
- F951 //cause there's cause there's influences fae all different places, I mean we've got our like Dutch influence on our accent and the Scandinavian and the German // //influence but ehm //

In his initial question, M865 has likely started to say “Standard Scots”, then has pulled back upon realizing that this would make the question a loaded one. F951 resists his attempt to shift the scale abruptly, and stays focussed on Shetland, making clear that it is *not* typical, in her view. When she then begins to cite supposed historical influences from other Germanic languages, it is not clear whether she is engaging in identity work or face work, or a combination of the two. First of all, it is ambiguous whether she means to attach these influences to Scots generally or just to Shetland; probably the latter, given that later on she will cite Scandinavian influence on Shetland as something that makes it distinctive from Scots. At the same time, citing a German influence mitigates any face threat to M865 from her deflection of his question with the accompanying implication that perhaps she is better informed than he is; the fact that he himself is German means that she is according him an expert₁ status which compensates for the loss of any expert₂ status which she may have suggested.

The interviewer shifts the discussion back toward the “Standard Scots” issue which he shied away from earlier.

- M865 Well I mean linguists nowadays would say is Scots is ehm, well, basically connected also to eh Robert Burns, spoken way be- before that and today survives in a number of dialects, like for example, ehm Glaswegian, Shetland, Doric, //ehm. //
- F951 //Mmhm // I wouldnae really actually think o the Shetland dialect as Scots.
- M865 Mm, you wouldn't agree?
- F951 No.
- M865 Okay why not?
- F951 That's just the noth - I mean it's just no what I immediately think of; when somebody speaks aboot Scots I think s- o a di- o a la- o a dialect that actually belongs somewhere on Scottish mainland.
- M865 Uh-huh uh-huh okay. Yeah. //I think, yeah, yeah, yeah. //
- F951 //Shetland has its own identity an I think you'll find that that most folk will say somethin along those lines tae ye. //

The interviewer begins by shifting the scale to the dividing line between Scots and Scottish English. It is true, as he suggests, that people in Scotland are much readier to identify Scots with 200-year-old poems, particularly those by the national bard, Burns, than with their own way of speaking. They are also quite aware of the highland-lowland and east-west divides, as well as the rural-urban differences, that make Glasgow speakers easy to distinguish from speakers of the Doric, as the dialect of Aberdeenshire is known. But including Shetland in his list of dialects seems to pose a face threat to the Shetlander whom he is interviewing. She quite firmly rejects the idea that the Shetland dialect is Scots. In so doing, she again contradicts, this time more directly, what he, the expert₂, has just said, and this seems to throw him off balance. His “Okay why not?” is an awkward response, but one which expresses an openness to her opinion, while at the same time challenging her to explain it. She, of course, is not a professional linguist, and while she has a strong feeling about her identity she does not have the sort of expertise₂ or the extensive experience in articulating or analyzing her linguistic identity that he has, as is apparent from her reply. And once again, while trying to explain herself she is negotiating face, and withdraws somewhat from her initial contradiction of him to assert, not that Shetland is not Scots, but that it is not prototypical – that when people speak of Scots they think first and foremost of mainland dialects, not island ones. The interviewer’s response is even more awkward, and focuses exclusively on resolving the discord, accepting her negotiated compromise; even when he starts to go back to rearticulate his initial view (“I think”), he immediately seems to think better of it and simply says “yeah yeah yeah” while letting her have priority to retain the floor, as she closes the exchange with an authoritative assertion of Shetland identity in which her only concession is that “most folk” would agree with her, in other words not necessarily everyone.

Further on, he returns to the issue from another direction, by showing the woman the Scots language webpage of the Scottish Parliament (see Figure One) to get her reaction to it.

- M865 //No problem [laugh].// //Ehm this is from the Scottish Parliament, a print-out from the from the internet,//
 F951 //Oh right.// [...] A- the notice on their website [inaudible] in Scots I suppose?
 M865 Uh-huh, yeah.
 F951 Oh that’s good! As lang as it’s eh ehm there’s also a translation, //[laugh] yeah.//

It is of course a traditional problem in creating a standardized, written version of a language that it cannot encompass the dialect variation amongst the population who are supposed to be the language’s users. The written Scots usage settled on for the Parliament is not the dialect of any particular place; that

Walcome tae the Scottish Pairlament wabsite



The Scottish Pairlament is here for tae represent aw Scotlan's folk.

We want tae mak siccar that as many folk as possible can finn oot aboot the Scottish Pairlament. Information anent whit we can dae tae help ye engage wi the Pairlament gin ye arenae fluent in English can be haen at [Langage assistance providit by the Scottish Pairlament \(22.2KB pdf\)](#).

This pairt o the wabsite hauds information anent the Scottish Pairlament that we hae product in Scots. Use the link aneath tae find oot mair.

- [Garrin the Scottish Pairlament Wark for You \(1.59MB pdf\)](#)

Contactin the Scottish Pairlament

Gin ye hae a quaision anent the Scottish Pairlament or the Memmers o the Scottish Pairlament (MSPs), ye can contact the Public Speirins Service in ony leid by post, email or fax.

Address:
Public Information Service
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

Fax: 0131 348 5601

Figure 1: Scottish Parliament Scots Language Website.

would create political problems and resistance from other dialect areas. In many respects, the place it belongs to is the early 19th century, for as the interviewer has indicated, whilst people may have difficulty identifying Scots vis-à-vis English, or indeed vis-à-vis Shetland or other related forms, all are quick to identify Scots with the poetry of Burns, which was linguistically nostalgic already in his own time. This again is far from unique: Dante's treatise *De vulgari eloquentia*, the first sustained reflection on the creation of a modern European standard language, likewise embodied a projection backward to a mythical past in which all Italians spoke a single Italian language – something

that was never actually the case, since dialect division *precedes* the creation of every standard language, even if subsequently history is reimagined as a fragmentation from an original unity (see Joseph 2004, 2006). As Hobsbawm has pointed out, the national standard language is, like the nation itself, a discursive construction:

National languages [...] are the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind. They are usually attempts to devise a standardized idiom out of a multiplicity of actually spoken idioms, which are downgraded to dialects [...]. (Hobsbawm 1990: 51)

Hobsbawm defines the standard language as “a sort of platonic idea of the language, existing behind and above all its variants and imperfect versions” (1990: 57). This also means that for the nation’s population “their” language will be for them something foreign, something which they have to learn through formal education.

To take the example of the British Isles (a term which is itself offensive to Irish nationalists but for which no alternative has been established), for centuries their linguistic pattern was a patchwork of local dialects, Germanic or Celtic in origin. Only in modern times did individuals motivated by nationalistic ambitions of various sorts set about to establish “languages” for the nations of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as for Cornwall and other smaller regions (which often constitute “nations” in the eyes of their more fervent partisans). In the case of Scotland, where two separate national languages emerged (Gaelic and Scots, of Celtic and Germanic provenance respectively), their co-existence has not favoured the development of linguistic nationalism, but has impeded it, as partisans of the two languages have focussed much of their energies on combating the rival claims of the other, rather than the hegemony of English. Although this makes Scotland sound like a failure in national linguistic terms, the vast majority of Scots do not see things this way; they consider the strategic economic value of using a world language as greatly outweighing the political, cultural and sentimental value of the “heritage” languages. A case might be made that the eternal struggle between Gaelic and Scots is an intelligent way of keeping the nationalist flame burning while making sure that it does not set fire to the bank.

As the Scottish case shows, there are no universals where language and national identity are concerned. Even the concepts of language and nation themselves are subject to local variation. We can, however, find certain patterns running through the linguistic construction of national identity world-wide, and they provide the matrix within which the vicissitudes of local construction can be read and compared.

That can create a combined crisis of identity and face, if the language that “belongs” to you turns out not to be one you can understand – as befalls the relatively few Scots who ever happen to come across the Scottish Parliament website. Note how when, gently challenged by the interviewer, our Shetland subject does not admit to not understanding the Scots; and when the truth comes out, how she struggles to save face.

- M865 //Okay, there is a an English version, yeah yeah.// So do you think it's a good idea? //Uh-huh, okay. Do you understand most of it or all of it?//
- F951 //Yeah like, yeah mmhm, yeah.// Yeah. “We want tae mak siccar that as mony folk as can be able tae find oot aboot //whit the shi- Scottish Parliament dis and whit wey it warks”//
- M865 //uh-huh// //What does “siccar” mean?//
- F951 //Yeah I can read it.// “Siccar” is like ehm [sigh] well we actually we actually describe “siccar” in a different way cause if we say somebody is siccar it's like they're ehm bad losers, //but but it's no in this context cause that's that's obviously the Shetland use.//
- M865 //Uh-huh uh-huh [laugh] okay, no no, no no.//
- U1028 //Oh-oh [inaudible]// Oh-oh
- M865 Do you know what it means? //Do you have any idea, “mak siccar”? I mean many, many people struggle with the word “siccar”.//
- F951 //”We want tae mak siccar that as mony fowk”//
- U1028 //[inaudible]// //[inaudible]//
- M865 //Mmhm, yeah.//
- F951 //Yeah well ye see I, I I wis wonderin when I read that word// //cause it's different tae what I understand as siccar.//
- M865 //Yeah//
- F951 “We want tae mak siccar that as mony fowk as can, as can as able tae fin oot”,
- U1028 [inaudible]
- F951 Well I think it's maybe meant tae be “make available”.
- M865 “Make sure” //Yeah that's it.//
- F951 //”Make sure”, yeah.//
- M865 And there's also another word which is rather difficult for most people ehm, “A range o different leids”. Do you know this word, “leids”?
- F951 “We hae” Nope. //”Leids”, “leids”, languages, oh no,//
- M865 //Oh it means “languages”, ehm “leids” yeah, mmhm, I think it's an ancient word, it's//
- F951 it's too ancient //for me [laugh].//

It is, of course, ironic that the Scots word for language itself, *leid*, should be unknown to most Scots; our informant's last comment is an admission that she guessed the meaning from context. As to how ancient the word is, ancientness is relative but *leid* is believed to derive from *Latin*; the name of the ultimate model for all modern European written languages. There is an alternative etymology, favoured by partisans of Scots as the national language, which derives

it from an Old Germanic word for “a people”, but in national identity terms that seems more fortunate than fortuitous, which in itself makes the derivation suspect.

Later the interviewer asks her about national identity. Given her earlier comments about Scots language belonging to the mainland, and aligning her instead with Shetland, one might expect this to be echoed in what she says about identity (see also Gill 2005). It is, eventually, but only after some prompting.

- M865 //And finally how// strongly do you feel British, Scottish, English and any //other,/
 F951 //Oh!// //Okay.//
 M865 //eh from zero meaning “not at all”// //to four meaning “very much”.//
 F951 //I feel, I think I’m// probably a three on British //and a four on Scottish,/
 M865 //Okay, mmhm// //mmhm//
 F951 //and a zero on English,// and I think I would would have to say that maybe a two
 for the other, just because I I still have a feeling that there’s somethin slightly Scandi-
 navian aboot a- all us //Shetlanders as well.//
 M865 //Okay, okay.// //So eh you would say two for Scandinavian, any for Shetland?//
 F951 //There’s a draw from there.// Oh and four because I’m yeah, I’m a true Shet-
 lander, //okay.//
 M865 Okay, right.// Most people would say yeah I think. //Right, yeah yeah, yeah yeah.//
 F951 //Sorry I thought I wis- I wisnae I wisnae thinkin aboot Shetland whan it cam doon
 tae other.// //Okay.//

Granted, the prompts “Scottish, British, English, other” would lead one to think of larger-scale identities with national status, which may explain why Scandinavian comes to the informant’s mind, but Shetland does not. Still, her Shetlandness is embedded in the relatively high 3 she gives to British as an identity label. Most Scots from the mainland would give it a lower number, but on Shetland Britishness acts as a control on a Scottish identity which makes islanders feel marginalized by mainlanders. In much the same way, 10 or 15 years ago, Scots were more likely than English people to align themselves with the European Union, which seemed to offer a control on a British identity in which they felt marginalized. That is less true now, because of political devolution since 1999 combined with a general unease over the “democratic deficit” in EU institutions and the structural problems of the Euro. Here we find something like an alien species being constructed discursively on a political level, again through talk about language. Admittedly, it is talk prompted by a linguist, but nothing about it is “unnatural”, and similar conversations can be heard unprompted quite regularly in any pub or other public setting.

4 Face, identity and stance: Amphibians in Newcastle

A second, briefer example will round out the picture of the tensions observed in the previous text. The extract which follows is from a conversation amongst a group of four young people who would not identify themselves as marginal in terms of Scottish identity (SCOTS Corpus Conversation 32). The woman in the group, whose English is the most Scots of the four, engages in some language gossip about Novocastrians, people from Newcastle, which is only an hour's drive from the Scottish border and where the local "Geordie" dialect is roughly on a par with vernacular Scottish English in terms of lacking prestige.

- F940 When I went doon tae England tae study at Northumbria University [laugh] right, no but we were talkin aboot alarm clocks an ken how in Argos they've got that fitba yin //the football one, [laugh] right, you used to, ye, when it gauns off in the mornin//
- M942 //[laugh]//
- M941 //You throw it at the wall.//
- F940 //ye, it says [inaudible] next to it,// //"Gently toss against the wall", [laugh] could you imagine it?//
- [...]
- F940 //so they were aw talkin aboot alarm clocks and I was like that to them, I'm goin [laugh]//
- M942 //[laugh]//
- F940 //[laugh]//
- M939 //You need a snooze button, come on [laugh].//
- F940 //an I was like that, "Oh, I want the fitbae yin", an they were like that, "The fibian? the fib-, what the hell's a fibian?", I went, "No, the fitbae yin",//
- M942 //[laugh]//
- F940 an they went, "Amphibian?", [laugh] I went, "The football one", //[laugh] an they were like that, "Aye, right, where the hell's this lassie frae?", I was like that, "Sorry, speak English, speak properly//
- M939 //[laugh]//
- F940 so that they understand".
- M942 My God, it's like fuckin "Tea-time with Mother" now //[laugh]//

Although F940 is the main character of her own story, it is gossip about the Novocastrians, who here stand for the English generally, and their seemingly deliberate lack of linguistic goodwill and of common sense. Any non-Scot might be sympathetic with a Geordie ear unable to process "the fitbae yin", but at the same time it is understandable that F940 would find it incredible that someone would be prepared to hear "amphibian" rather than "the football one" in the context of looking at a catalogue of alarm clocks where one of them is shaped

like a football. It is part of normal human intelligence to integrate contextual clues into semantic and pragmatic understanding of utterances; failure to do so turns one into an alien species.

In F940's case, though, the most interesting thing is the last part of what I have quoted, where she takes on the stance of those she is constructing as the alien other: she has *them* using the Scottish "Aye, right, where the hell's this lassie frae?", whilst imagining her own voice using the English "Sorry, speak English, speak properly so that they understand". This reversal of voice is not typical in my experience: the kind of stance reversal that I am familiar with and likely to engage in myself takes the form of reporting the other's utterances in an imitation of the other's voice. Possibly in this group – possibly more generally in Glasgow youth speak, or British youth speak, or youth speak *tout court* – a more complex distribution of stance, voice and utterance is becoming the norm. But one of the interlocutors remarks directly on her linguistic stance with his comment "My God, it's like fuckin 'Tea-time with Mother' now", a reference to *Tea with Mother*, a BBC programme of decades past in which "mother" speaks with a "posh" English accent.

In this case, unlike the Shetland one, we are dealing not with a first-hand face threat, but a reported one, which the person involved has constructed into a story about a critical moment in her identity awareness. Writing recently about what he calls "moment analysis", Li Wei (2011) has demonstrated the importance of such instances in the individual's construction of their personal identity. The face threat and the linguistic negotiation are what lend the story its drama, making it a well-constructed story that is worth telling over and over. The identity content is about the linguistic difference between being Scottish and English, even in the very north of England, and also about the cultural difference, specifically what the speaker perceives as the obtuseness of the English in sometimes refusing to do the slightest bit of contextualization in order to understand a Scots dialect. It is thus a reflection on national character (or caricature) in terms of reaction to face threats, as well as on linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. The fact that it is a reported event opens the way to the use of stance, but in a curious way. The speaker voices the stance of the English toward her in a rather broad version of her own Scots dialect, then voices her own stance of needing to accommodate linguistically in a rather upper-class Standard English accent. This seems counter-intuitive; but it does, after all, provide an illustration, or rather a performance, both of what linguistic accommodation ought to consist of in the speaker's view, and of her own ability to do it, in contrast with those English people she found so woefully lacking in politeness that they endure in her narrative of personal linguistic identity.

5 Conclusions

These extracts have shown us two ways in which identity and face interact. In the first, face is being negotiated over the tension between an expert₁ insider and an expert₂ outsider as to who has the authority to say what local linguistic identity consists of. It is not a simple matter. Expertise₁ claims its authority based on the depth of insight that only an insider can possess, but this can come at the expense of the breadth that an expert₂ has acquired by studying reports of the views of a wider range of members of the insider community. Nothing prevents an expert₁ from acquiring expertise₂, of course – indeed, the concept of face entered modern sociology through the work of just such an expert₁₊₂ (Yang 1945) – but even then the person's expertise₁ will be limited to their local identity, leaving their expertise₂ just as exposed to criticism and different interpretation. In the case at hand, the expert₂ knows more about the standard written form of the language than the expert₁ does, and uses this to restore the balance of authority between them; but it is a risky strategy, posing a face threat to the expert₂, who does not want to admit that she cannot read “her own” language. Still, the situation is mitigated by the fact that the written language is Scots, and therefore belongs to the mainland, which is not the identity she claims for herself but the one in opposition to which she constructs her own Shetland identity.

In the second extract, a critical moment of linguistic and cultural identity construction centred on a face threat has been turned into the sort of narrative through which identities are maintained and given power. The speaker perceives herself, and by extension all Scots, as linguistically flexible and accommodating, characteristics which she performs in her deployment of stance, in contrast with the English, whose linguistic inflexibility becomes an intrusion on the face of others. Although her story involves a small number of individuals from Newcastle, they are never named or otherwise identified, but bundled into a “they” that becomes representative of English culture generally.

What has emerged from this analysis is the difficulty of separating identity work and face work, at least in any conversation where language and identity are part of the subject matter. In the first case, differences in both linguistic and cultural identity between the interlocutors led to complex interactions around face. In the second case, the interlocutors share a linguistic and cultural identity, but maintain and strengthen it by repeating narratives about face threats posed by encounters with linguistic and cultural “others”, as well as by commenting on the stances taken in reporting such encounters. In fact, the speaker in this case introduces the story by apologizing to her friends that she has probably told it to them a hundred times before:

F940 //Ken what I said to them in England right when I went doon, I probably telt ye this
a hundred times afore,// but the folk on the tape havenae heard it, so get in! [laugh]

Yet another stance reversal: by “the folk on the tape” who haven’t heard the story she means us, the intended audience of listeners-in to the conversation, though, in the usual sense, she and her friends are “the folk on the tape”. But by saying this she brings us into the conversation, and onto the tape; we come to occupy a third scale of indexicality, taken from a higher perspective from that of her group of friends present in the room with her as she narrates the tale, or those who are part of the story being recounted.

It was pointed out in the opening section that, classically, and still to a large extent in general usage, identity and face are taken as representing temporally different ways of looking at the same phenomena, where the former is durative and the latter punctual. As we have seen, when we look for explanations of punctual actions and events, we always have recourse to durative characteristics of those who perform them; and when we look for evidence to support those durative characteristics, all that we can cite are the punctual actions and events that we interpret as embodying and indexing them. This complexity is multiplied by that of the different scales on which face and identity are observed and indexed. And it is precisely because linguistic differences are so thoroughly and powerfully indexed, both within and across cultures, that talking about them, and about the identities with which they are bound up, inevitably creates face-threats. Amidst all these intertwined perspectives, one thing is abundantly clear: with so much to sort out, the topic of face and identity deserves to be a focus of empirical, analytical, methodological and theoretical attention for quite some time to come.

Bionote

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